

Well over 5,000 hear Hallé Orchestra Concert

It was a unique experience to attend the concert which was given by John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra in the King's Hall on Tuesday evening. No concert of this kind in Belfast had ever attracted such a huge audience – there were, I understand, well over 5,000 people present – and in addition to that it was quite a new experience for most of the auditors to hear music performed in such a vast space. It did require some adjustment of values.

Conditions precluded the fairly close contact with the players that one is accustomed to in a smaller hall, and as a consequence one was at first inclined to listen with a greater degree of detachment than usual. Everything seemed to come from such a remote distance. At times details of rhythm were slightly blurred and sound carried into actual rests.

Such disadvantages can be remedied, however, and I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed the experience in spite of the occasional drawbacks. For it was such a great pleasure to hear a conductor who is unquestionably in the front rank, and in addition to that, to listen once again to orchestral playing that always represented a first-rate standard.

THE SEAL OF GREATNESS

The Beethoven Symphony No.7 in A major, Op. 92, would by itself have set the seal of greatness on the occasion, not only as a performance but also as a reading of unusual penetration. The lengthy introduction to its opening Vivace movement had tremendous power, and set perfectly the mood of suspense which is the dominating purpose of these pages. For the rest, the symphony may be said to be a study in rhythmical rather than in melodic development, culminating in the unrestrained gaiety of its bacchic finale, and Mr. Barbirolli's acute sense of accent gave to the work as a whole a finely cumulative build. This is not to say that the conductor was unmindful of many detailed beauties, or for that matter, that the work itself is lacking in melodic beauty. The rather mysterious, march-like, Allegretto is a span of lovely melody, and the themes of the other movements never lack distinction in this respect. But their whole character is derived from their marked rhythmical shape and it was a particular merit in the performance that they were never given an undue prominence.

The programme opened with the overture *Le Carnaval romain* by Berlioz, a performance of great vivacity, in which the beauty of the phrasing was a delight to hear. (A special word of praise in this respect must go to the player of the cor anglais.) Mozart's serenade for strings – *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* – was also played with the utmost grace of phrase. Its tempo was perhaps on the fast side, for Mr. Barbirolli is prone to a brilliant pace. Such things, however, were kept to a true relation, one section with another.

MOST SUCCESSFUL OF ALL

Perhaps the most completely successful performance of all, taking into consideration the conditions which prevailed on this occasion, was the intermezzo, *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*, from the Delius opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet*. This was mainly because its effect is so greatly harmonic. Anyway it is music of the most poetic kind, and it lost nothing of its essential quality in this most sensitive performance. Ravel's famous *Bolero*, played with a splendid rhythmical verve, brought the concert to a brilliant close. Whether the end is commensurate with the means might be doubted, unless, of course, the whole thing is meant to be taken as a joke, as the programme note suggested. But even then one might still doubt if it was really worthwhile.